

Outbreak of legionnaires' disease among tourists staying at a hotel in Phuket, Thailand

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Four cases of legionnaires' disease have recently been reported in one Norwegian, one Finn and two people from Sweden. These patients were all among guests staying at a hotel in Patong Beach, Phuket, Thailand since 20 November 2006. The patients became ill between 6-9 December and on 26 December 2006. Three cases are in men (aged 24 – 66) and one is in a woman (aged 51). None of the cases has been fatal.

The responsible national institutes have informed tour operators with whom patients travelled about the suspected link to the hotel. Some tour operators have stopped using the hotel for their guests temporarily, and all tour operators in Norway, Finland and Sweden who used the hotel are informing all guests who stayed at the hotel since 20 November 2006 by e-mail or post.

Reporting of the individual cases to the European Working Group for Legionella Infections (EWGLI) resulted in a cluster alert being issued on the 3 January 2006 within the EWGLI network, and to the International Federation of Tour Operators, World Health Organization and European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC). Following confirmation of the fourth case from Norway, an alert was issued to the Early Warning and Response System on the 9 January 2007.

The WHO and ECDC are co-ordinating follow-up of recent visitors to the hotel who may not have been contacted through tour operators. Information about the cluster and advice to returning travellers has been issued on the following national institute websites (National Public Health Institute Finland: <http://www.ktl.fi>, Norwegian Institute for Public Health: <http://www.fhi.no>, Swedish Institute for Infectious Disease Control: <http://www.smittskyddsinstitutet.se>).

Legionnaires' disease (or legionellosis) is a bacterial infection which presents as an atypical form of pneumonia, treatable with antibiotics. Person to person transmission of the infection has never been demonstrated. Incubation time is normally 2-10 days. Symptoms include fever, chills, headache and muscle pain followed by a dry cough and breathing difficulties associated with the pneumonia.